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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the structure of Japanese telecommunication industries and how the various parts of the mechanism work together. Explanations of the Japanese: 1) structure of telecommunication industries; 2) control of regulatory lags; 3) text information service and regulation; and 4) text information service and the telecommunication industry are given. Diagramatical presentations on the major characteristics of the system are included. (HAB)

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Telecommunication Policy Structure

in Japan

— Summary —

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Introduction

A rapid progress of communication technology has brought not only convergence of media, but also transformation of "media ecology". The latter is closely related to the distribution of media resources, such as cellulose, copper, plastics, frequency spectrum, electric energy, space and man power. It also has a close relationship with communicators' efforts. Telecommunications policy should stimulate realizing optimum distribution of media resources in each community, in each nation and in the world. In Japan, telecommunication policy has been very important because of scarcity of media resources. Fortunately, it has been stimulating the remarkable growth of telecommunication industries in Japan.

This paper outlines structure of Japanese telecommunication industries and how the mechanism works so effectively and hormoneonsly.

1. Structure of Telecommunication Industries in Japan

Telecommunication policy can be effective only if it is suitable for characteristics of the structure of telecommunication industries.

In Japan, there has been very unique structure which is still workable for "information-oriented society". Outline of it is shown in Fig 1.

Major characteristics are:

(1) Operators are separated from manufacturers.

(2) Domestic and overseas telecommunication services are monopolized and provided by separated entities.

(3) Both public and commercial broadcastings are provided throughout Japan.

(4) CATV industries are rather premature.

(5) Relationship of various entities among telecommunication industies are very close and euphonions.

(6) Jurisdiction on telecommunication services is absolutely centralized. There is no regulatory issues at prefectural level in Japan, which means comparatively simple and comprehensive policy structure.

2. Control of Regulatory Lags in Japan

When a new medium enters into a media ecosystem, it will bring changes in the distribution of media resources. Generally speaking, such changes would be, to some extent, limitd by existing regulations, until neccessary precedures are taken to revise the regulations in proportion with social needs. Regulations are usually behind social changes.

As shown in Fig. 2, level of social needs for telecommunication services has grown year by year, in proportion to the changes of social activities. Besides, users of telecommunication services in Japan are very sensitive about new changes which are occuring abroad. Therefore, the level of social needs soars up sharply when information of new progress in telecommunication services abroad is reported. They strongly demand revision in Japanese regulatory precedure so that the new service abroad may soon be introduced and they will be able to enjoy it.

On the other hand, social supplies level for telecommunication services follows social needs level with some lags and gaps.

It should be pointed ont, however, that regulation follows relatively quickly in Japanese telecommunication field, because of characteriatics of structure in the industries mentioned above.

3. Text Information Service and Regulation

The commercial market for information service is not fullfledged yet in Japan. The regulatory body is now performing a feasibility study on text information service.

Tama New Town Experiment has been provising a lot of invaluable

information for this objective.

It should be noticed, however, that public telecommunication services, such as telephone and telegraph, have been handled on a monopoly basis from their beginning in Japan. Since text information service is classified as a "request for still picture service" and was recognized as a kind of public telecommunication services, neccessary legal precedures were required before the experiment at Tama began. At present, a special clause of "exceptional case", defined in Japan's Wire Communication Law is invoked for experimental text information service. There was only a little lag between introduction of text information service and regulatory revision.

4. Text Information Service and Telecommunication Industry

After two decades of rapid growth, it seems that the expansion of telephone service in Japan has passed an inflection point, and it is trying to provide for a prosperous market of other new services. Text information service, such as an interactive one, will be one of them in the future.

In Japan, there is a euphonious relationship among telecommunication industries. The administration usually takes leadership in setting up various committees related to new services. As a whole, Japanese media ecosystem is adaptable to any changes in social needs.

Fig 1. Structure of Telecomm. Industry in Japan

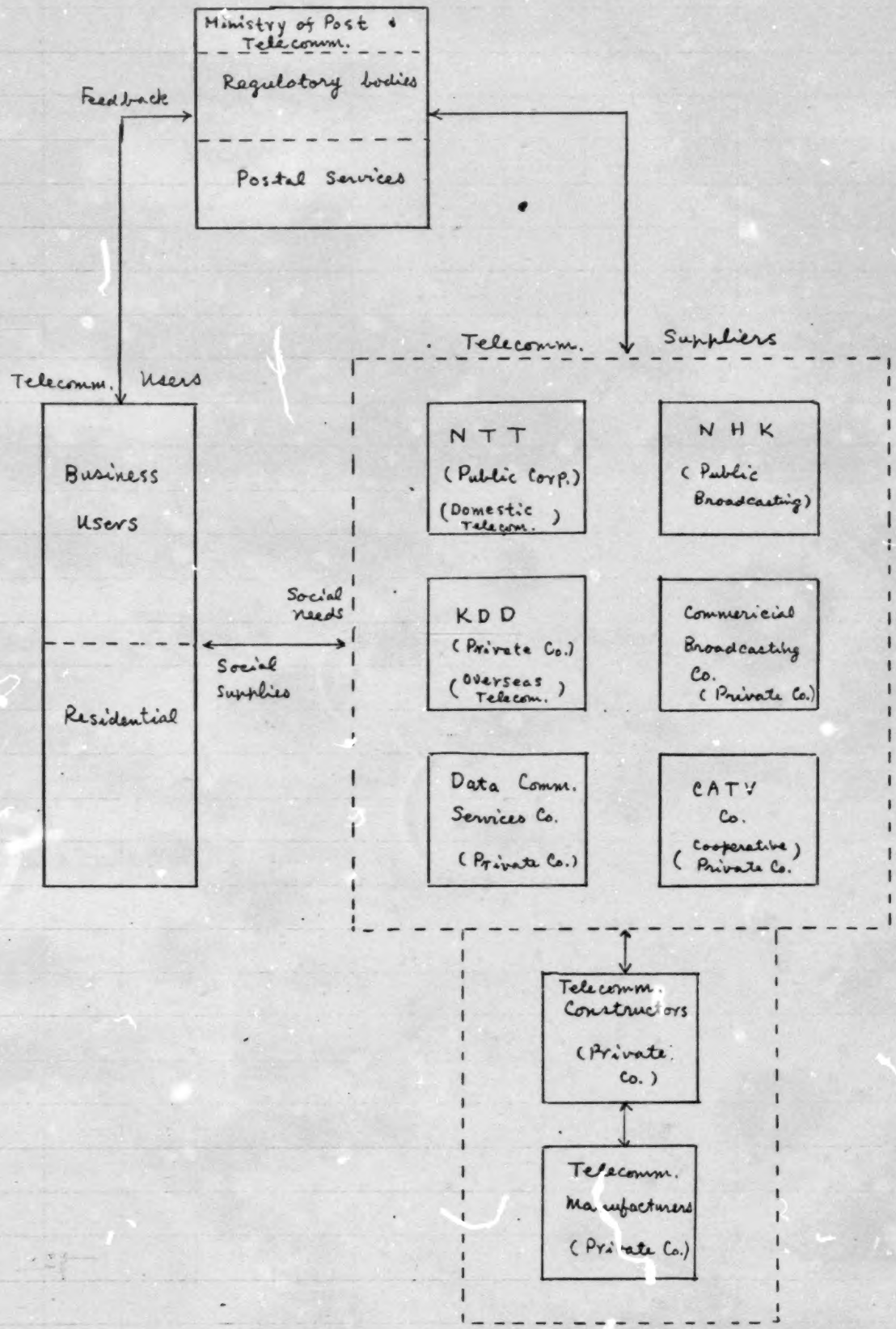

Fig 2. Regulatory Lags and Gaps